



July 1, 2010

The Honorable Jim McDermott  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support  
House Ways and Means Committee  
317-B Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman McDermott:

On behalf of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to submit comments for the record for the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support's *Hearing to Review Responsible Fatherhood Programs*, held June 17, 2010.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy seeks to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy, especially among single, young adults through a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors. If we are successful, child and family well-being will improve. There will be less poverty, more opportunities for young men and women to complete their education or achieve other life goals, fewer abortions, and a stronger nation.

As Congress and the Administration seek to promote responsible fatherhood, The National Campaign believes that a key part of this effort should be to help young men be more intentional about when and if to have children and to be prepared for the financial and emotional responsibilities that come with being a parent. Men, whether they are not yet parents or if they already have children, need to think about the consequences of having children and be involved in pregnancy planning and prevention as much as women do. Too often, discussions of responsible fatherhood start once someone becomes a father. Expanding the notion of responsible fatherhood to help men who are not yet ready to be fathers wait to have children—or have additional children—until they are prepared emotionally and financially will help to improve child and family well-being.

According to a 2010 survey published by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 86 percent of men (18 – 29 years old) say that avoiding pregnancy is very important to them at this point in their lives. In addition, 94 percent of men believe that pregnancy should be planned, with 74 percent of those men *strongly* agreeing that pregnancy should be planned. Yet, more than half of pregnancies reported by men in their 20s are unplanned. These high levels of unplanned pregnancy among unmarried young adults reflect a disconnect between their own aspirations and their actions, and points to the need to better support them in achieving their own goals.

[Responsible behavior.](#) [Responsible policies.](#)

Evidence also shows early and unplanned pregnancy is closely connected with limited father absence, and risks to child well-being for which there are profound generational effects. Children who live apart from their fathers are five times more likely to be poor than children with both parents at home. Boys and girls without involved fathers are twice as likely to drop out of school, twice as likely to abuse alcohol or drugs, twice as likely to end up in jail, and two to three times more likely to need help for emotional or behavioral problems. Teen girls who don't have a father in their life are two times more likely to initiate sexual activity early and are seven times more likely to get pregnant compared to girls with fathers present. Sons of teen fathers are more likely to become teen fathers than are sons of older fathers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Administration's proposed Fatherhood, Marriage, and Families Innovation Fund (Innovation Fund) offers the potential to help young men who are already parents—whether they are part of a couple or a non-custodial parent—as well as those who are not yet parents be more intentional about the most important responsibility any one can take on and avoid unplanned pregnancy. Specifically, we hope it provides flexibility for states, working in partnership with community partners, to:

1. Help young men and women who are not yet parents achieve their own goals – education, employment, and other life goals – and wait to become parents until they are ready to accept the financial and emotional responsibilities that come with being a parent (*primary* prevention). This includes understanding the consequences of early parenting on their education, employment, and family prospects, as well as on the next generation.
2. Help those who are already parents – non-custodial, custodial, and couples – achieve their own family goals about when or if they want to have additional children (timing/spacing of *subsequent* pregnancies) and how these decisions will affect their relationships, goals, and outcomes for the children they already have. This includes equipping parents with the knowledge and skills to make smart decisions and ensuring they have access to services that will help them act on these decisions.
3. Help parents to communicate more effectively with their children about pregnancy planning and prevention, healthy relationships, and life goals.

As Congress considers legislative action related to responsible fatherhood, including the Administration's proposed Innovation Fund, The National Campaign offers several recommendations that would promote responsible fatherhood, as well as strengthen families and improve child outcomes:

- **Responsible fatherhood programs:** The Innovation Fund presents an important opportunity to underscore the message that becoming a father is such a profound responsibility and that a responsible father waits to have children until he is prepared emotionally and financially to support a child (or additional children). Including the discussion of pregnancy planning and prevention in comprehensive responsible fatherhood programs would help men who are not yet ready to be fathers avoid early and unplanned pregnancy in the first place as well as helping

[Responsible behavior.](#) [Responsible policies.](#)

men who are already fathers delay having additional children until they are ready emotionally, financially, and otherwise (such as being in a stable healthy relationship, including marriage). Programs should also equip men—with or without children—with skills to communicate with their partners on these topics in order to avoid unplanned pregnancy.

- **Relationship education:** Activities related to relationship education delivered in conjunction with other services and activities could help couples communicate about and get clear on their goals regarding if and when to have additional children. An example of such a program is a new module called “Planning for Children Module: Helping Couples Get on the Same Page about If or When to Have More Children.” This innovative tool has been specifically developed for low-income couples in healthy relationship and marriage programs. It highlights the importance of timing pregnancies in order to reach family goals and achieve family stability and enables couples to create a shared vision about if or when to have another child and the use of contraception if they are not both trying to have another baby.
- **Improve family functioning and parenting skills:** With the Innovation Fund’s focus on improving child and family outcomes, it is important to provide parents with an opportunity to learn about pregnancy planning and prevention and birth spacing and the effect their decisions will have on their relationships and on the children they already have. We imagine that many programs supported through the Innovation Fund will emphasize communication and relationship skills. In this context, activities that seek to improve family well-being and child outcomes could also help improve communication between partners about decisions affecting their children and helping them be the best parents they can to the children they already have. For example, the Planning for Children module give couples the tools to identify how another pregnancy or child right now might affect their relationship and their ability to meet the needs of the child(ren) they already have.
- **Strengthen linkages with states’ Child Support Enforcement programs:** Although the Child Support Enforcement Program primarily aims to ensure that fathers are financially responsible for the children they already have, the Innovation Fund could serve as a bridge by providing an opportunity to focus on what could be called child support prevention—helping young men understand the consequences of early fatherhood and avoid becoming a father until they are ready to assume the financial, emotional, and other responsibilities entailed in becoming a parent, whether for the first or subsequent time. A few states are doing innovative work in this area with high school students, notably Texas, West Virginia, and New York, but through the Innovation Fund more could be done nationally. West Virginia is also collaborating between its child support and family planning programs, providing information about family planning in its periodic child support mailings and distributing information about family planning resources at child support offices. In addition, outreach to parents at birth to establish paternity presents an opportunity to discuss a couple’s plans in terms of additional children and to educate parents about spacing additional births. For men who are already struggling with child support debt, it could be powerful to discuss the financial and legal implications of fathering additional children.
- **Strengthen father involvement:** Over two decades of research confirms that parents—including fathers—are an important influence on their children’s decisions about sex, love,

[Responsible behavior.](#) [Responsible policies.](#)

relationships, values and whether their teens become pregnant or cause a pregnancy, including whether their children have sex and use contraception. Through the Innovation Fund programs could focus on helping fathers talk to their sons and daughters about avoiding early pregnancy.

Thank you for bringing attention to this most important issue and for considering our recommendations. We offer our assistance as you continue to examine strategies for making progress on responsible fatherhood initiatives. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Lisa Shuger, Director of Public Policy, at [lshuger@thenc.org](mailto:lshuger@thenc.org) or 202-478-8576.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sarah S. Brown  
CEO

Responsible behavior. Responsible policies.